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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CONAKRY 000152

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SUBJECT: SYLLAH IN, SYLLAH OUT - WHO RUNS THE PATRONAT?

REF: CONAKRY 0100

Classified By: POL/ECON CHIEF SHANNON CAZEAU FOR REASON 1.4 B AND D

11. (U) SUMMARY. A few weeks ago, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs appointed Mamadou Syllah as the head of the government's official delegation to the International Labor Conference in Geneva. On April 26, the MFA retracted the designation following heavy criticism from the media, the population, and UN representatives in the country. It is unclear who is behind either decision, but the incident suggests continued power plays behind the scenes. END SUMMARY.

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BACKGROUND  
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12. (U) Mamadou Syllah, a highly controversial figure, is widely seen as one of President Conte's closest associates. It was the president's decision to release Syllah from jail where he was being held on charges related to embezzling more than \$22 million, that sparked the nationwide labor strike and subsequent civil unrest in early 2007. Later in 2007, the Patronat split into two divisions, one supporting Mamadou Syllah and the other supporting Yousouff Diallo. The new director of the National Communications Council (CNC) sent a letter to the Minister of Communications in April asking the ministry to identify the legitimate head of the Patronat in order to avoid confusion in the printed press. Although he claimed to be non-partisan, the letter was widely perceived as being biased in favor of Syllah (reftel).

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GOVERNMENT APPOINTS SYLLAH TO HEAD DELEGATION  
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13. (U) On April 21, the local internet press reported that the Minister of Foreign Affairs had named Mamadou Syllah as the head of the Guinean Government's official delegation to the International Labor Conference in Geneva in May. The media characterized the designation as official government recognition of the Syllah Patronat, thus legitimizing Syllah's Patronat, as opposed to Yousouff Diallo's, as the country's only official business association organization.

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AND THEN TAKES IT BACK  
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14. (U) However, on April 26, the Minister of Foreign Affairs issued another order retracting the designation. The order states that the MFA does not have the power or ability to decide the appropriate representative from the Patronat.

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POLITICS, POLITICS, POLITICS  
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15. (C) When the initial order was publicized, the press reported that National Assembly deputies asked Prime Minister Kouyate about the designation during a meeting on April 17. The PM reportedly denied knowing anything about the decree or the designation. However, the Economic Advisor at the Ministry of Finance, Roger Milimono, told Econoff on April 23 that the PM was aware of the decision and personally authorized it. Contact said the PM agreed to the designation in an effort to try and gain the president's favor, but after seeing the public reaction, decided to distance himself.

16. (C) Milimono also said that the Minister of Foreign Affairs was out of the country when the designation was made even though the order was reportedly signed by the minister himself. According to Milimono, all of the ministers were aware of the decision because it was discussed at a Council of Ministers meeting before it was made public. He added that the designation is illegal because only a government official, and usually a minister, can head an official government delegation.

17. (SBU) During an April 29 meeting with Poloff, union leader Serah Rabiato Diallo said that the designation serves as further evidence that the consensus government is just as bad as previous governments. She said the government does not have the right to interfere in a private business organization and that the head of delegation must be a government official. Rabiato also noted that the official delegation, as initially named, did not include any government representatives nor any union representatives

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despite the fact that the conference focuses on labor issues.

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COMMENT  
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18. (C) The motivations behind the designation, as well as who orchestrated it, remain unclear. As usual, there are number of rumors circulating with one being that Kouyate struck a deal with Syllah after President Conte dismissed Justin Morel Jr. as Minister of Communications. According to the rumor, Syllah has been acting as an intermediary between the PM and the president, in exchange for a dismissal of the criminal case against Syllah. The MFA designation could have been an extension of this alleged deal. However, the Patronat is an inherently private organization and considered one of the pillars of civil society. As such, there should be no government interference. While the details are unclear, the fact that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs made a public stance in support of Mamadou Syllah, a member of the president's inner circle, suggest that unidentified individuals continue to make quiet power plays behind the scenes. END COMMENT.  
CARTER